

Table of Contents

- ***Armed Islamist atrocities surge***
-

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Excerpt: Attacks on churches, Centre-Nord, Sahel and Est regions.

Human Rights Watch (06.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2tHbzVb> - On May 12, 2019, about 30 armed Islamists carried out an attack on the Catholic Church in Dablo, Centre-Nord region. Six witnesses described the attack, which left six men dead including Father Simeon Yampa.

One witness said:

The mass started at 8:30 a.m. Around 8:45 a.m., we heard the motorcycles...then saw them through the windows. The church was so full that dozens of worshippers had to celebrate outside. One group of jihadists surrounded those outside then another entered the church, creating panic...Those who could scrambled out. But then they blocked the doors.

A worshipper who was hiding meters from the church said:

Father Yampa fled outside through his dressing chamber. He ran about three meters, but a jihadist pointed his gun at him saying, "You will not escape." The priest turned around, raised his hands, clutching the Bible, and sunk to his knees. And the jihadist shot him in the chest, saying, "Allahu Akbar."

Another worshipper described what happened inside the church:

Dozens of us were trapped, including many from the choir. We were ordered to exit the church one-by-one after giving the jihadists our ID cards and phones. They ordered about 20 men to lie down outside, a few meters from the church, all face down in a row. Then they started killing. I couldn't look. ...I just prayed... Then one of them received a phone call – and the killing stopped.

A woman said that, "the Islamists ordered us to abandon Christianity and said if they returned to find us [the women] unveiled, they'd kill us." Another said that after the executions, "they burned robes used by the catechists, tam tams [drums], church documents, Bibles, cloth used to cover the altar, and, before leaving, stole motorcycles, looted goods, and burned two cars and part of the market."

One man said that the church attack "signaled the beginning of a severe deterioration of security in our area, which is largely Christian." Another said, "Since May, there are more and more jihadists. Dozens of people have been killed on their farms, in village attacks and in ambushes." Community leaders said tens of thousands of villagers have fled this area since May 2019.

On May 13, the day after the Dablo attack, armed Islamists attacked a procession of Catholic worshippers carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary from village to village in Bam province, in Centre-Nord region, as part of the Marian devotions. The attacker executed four men and burned the statue.

A witness said:

We were around 70 people accompanying the Virgin from village to village, when suddenly, I saw seven motorcycles with two heavily armed men on each come racing towards us. The Virgin was in a motorized tricycle with about 10 people and the rest of us were walking. All who could, including me, scattered, but those in the tricycle didn't have time. Some minutes later, I heard gunfire. ...Pam! Pam! Around 4 p.m., we returned and found the bodies of our four brothers, face down, about 40 meters from the path. The attackers had freed the children and a young woman. The tricycle, with the Virgin, was burned a few meters away.

Earlier, on April 28, armed Islamists executed six congregants of the Assemblies of God Protestant church, including the pastor, in Silgadji village, Sahel region. The victims, all men, appeared to have been targeted for their real or perceived support of a local defense group.

One witness, hiding about 20 meters from the church, said:

As the service ended, I saw around 20 armed men surrounding the church as the women prepared lunch. Twenty others blocked the paths out of the village. One jihadist took out a list of people they said were working with the Koglweago [a local defense group], calling out the names, which included the elderly Pastor Pierre Ouédraogo and his son. They ordered them to lie face down, then a jihadist shot them ... two times each in the head. People were horrified... The victims were all [ethnic] Mossi. Then they took the food that had been prepared, put it in the tricycle belonging to one of the men executed, and left.

On December 1, 2019, alleged armed Islamists executed 14 congregants of the Protestant church in Hantoukoura, Est region. All of the dead were ethnic Gourmantché, and they included the pastor, Woba Noé, and a boy of around 12 years old.

A man who survived by hiding meters from the church said:

Service finished around 12:45. As I left church, I saw six jihadists standing some distance away. I knew something bad was coming, so I ran, turning around only once to see them herding people together. They wore turbans; most had big rifles with bullet clips in their vests. Minutes later, I heard gunfire. When I knew the jihadists were gone, I rushed back, finding 14 of our people, face down, about five meters from the church, each shot in the head. Before the killing started, I was told they ordered the women to move away, and that they'd blamed us for supporting the Koglweago, but they'd deserted our village two months earlier. The women wailed in grief. My cousin was among the dead... the jihadists took the men's CNIB (identify cards) and, from my cousin, they also took his bible.